



Testimony to the Senate Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Committee

RE: Senate Bills 873-877 and Senate Resolution 129

March 20, 2014

Hello my name is Nancy Krupiarz, Executive Director of the Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance. We are a statewide 501c3 organization with about 1,000 members. We provide technical assistance to communities on the planning, acquisition, development, maintenance and operation of multi-use trails. We work on policy at the state, federal, and local levels that help to facilitate an interconnected system of trails and greenways across the state. And lastly, we promote our trails to the public, both through the information we distribute far and wide, and through our Michigander bicycle tour, an annual week-long bike adventure on the multi-use trails with about 800 participants.

I have been involved with Michigan's trail system for 17 years now, first with Rails to Trails Conservancy, Michigan chapter and the last 8 years with Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance. I am a member of the Michigan Snowmobile and Trails Advisory Council and Chair of its advisory work group, covering all nonmotorized trails, including hiking, mtn. biking, rail-trail, water trail activities as well as cross-country skiing, and snowshoe trails. From the time I first began my trails work, I was concerned about the fact that even though we have a Michigan Trailways Act, it was quickly rendered obsolete in several areas. 1) there were only just 2 rail-trails that ever received the Michigan Trailways designation. It was quite a cumbersome process to go through the Natural Resources Commission to receive this designation, and 2) there was never significant enough dollars in the Michigan Trailways Fund to make it worthwhile. The concessions along trails to generate dollars for the fund as well as significant revenues from easements never really materialized. 3) Although we have steadily remained #1 in terms of rail-trail mileage, it was clear to me there were many other significant trail efforts in the state that did not receive the same attention that rail-trails did.

The Michigan Comprehensive Trails Plan changes all that. It is a digest of each type of trail grid that we have in this state that all together make up Michigan's wonderful overall trail system. It calls to attention some of the significant trails, like the Keeweenaw area's nationally recognized mtn. bike network, the Bill Nicholls snowmobile trail, the Shore to Shore equestrian trail, the North Country National Scenic Trail, the Bass Lake Motorcycle Trail, the North Central State rail-trail, and others. Since

the plan's completion, other trails have risen, such as our first nationally designated water trail, the Island Loop Trail in St. Clair county. There are these and many others that make up our iconic trail system that need to be showcased to the world. And what better way to do it than to select the best of the best and call them Pure Michigan trails, just one component of the brand that makes Michigan a great recreation and a great outdoors state.

There are many recommendations in the Michigan Comprehensive Trails Plan to better establish us as the #1 Trail State. These bills help to accomplish several of those recommendations:

- The new designation of "Pure Michigan Trail" will initiate development of state guidelines for each type of trail that can be aspired to through each trail project. I am aware that many of these exist at the national level but we should pull these in and recognize these at the state level.
- The new designation of "Pure Michigan Trail Town" will prompt more communities to strategically address their interaction and placemaking with their trail, in a grassroots, multi-faceted Main Street approach. Several communities in Michigan have already embraced the program used by the Allegheny Passage Trail in Maryland and Pennsylvania that has stimulated 93 new trail-related businesses opening on the trail, \$40.8 million of economic impact and business owners that attribute 25% of their revenues to their proximity of the trail. Kentucky is another state that has set up their own trail town program and has had resounding success.
- Changing the name of the Michigan Snowmobile and Trails Advisory Council makes sense. There's no need to call out one particular type of trail in the name under a council which works for the good of all the trails. The introduction of water trails into the focus of the Council is a step that's long overdue, especially when you consider the abundance of water throughout and around our state and the opportunities for recreation. Formalizing this emphasis will help the water trail subcommittee representing groups all over the state provide a quality system of recognized water trails.
- Creating a central electronic portal for all trails in Michigan has been cited recently as a top recommendation in several landmark plans, including the Trails Plan, the Blue Ribbon Panel on State Parks, and the Michigan Tourism Industry Strategic Plan. Trail information in Michigan today is fragmented and inaccessible. It's almost like we're trying to keep our trails a secret! It needs to be consolidated on a landing page of the Pure Michigan Travel website, easy to find, enticing, and informative so visitors are aware and motivated to come to our state for their trail adventures.
- Coordinating adopt a trail cleanups with other cleanup efforts on public land is a no nonsense way to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of volunteer efforts. And this package includes a resolution recognizing the efforts of all trail volunteers in their role of making Michigan's trail system happen and continue to happen. They are the lifeblood of the trails, and without them, we would never have attained our #1 trail status in the country. The passion and commitment shown by Michigan's trail volunteers is unparalleled and I'm so eager to recognize them in this way.

This legislation which dovetails with the Michigan Comprehensive Trails Plan will propel the Michigan Trails Advisory Council forward in its work on implementation. Your acknowledgement and elevation of all the work trail groups are doing to reinforce our state as a trails destination is sincerely needed and appreciated.

